Programme timetable

Time	Event		
10:30 - 11:00	Arrival and Registration		
11:00 - 11:10	Welcome by the Conference Committee		
11:10 - 11:50	Keynote Presentation Dr Tina Skinner, University of Bath		
11:50 - 12:05	Break		
12:05 - 12:55	Session 1.A Where Are the Instructions for Public Involvement? Jude McClellan, UWE Bristol From Penguins to Policy: A Placement at the British Antarctic Survey Jordane Liebeaux, University of Bristol	Session 1.B Keeping the Box Open: Rethinking Certainty in Researching Statelessness Qi Ye, University of Bath Researching Uncertainty: Charismatic Political Discourse, Youth Polarisation and Ethical Reflexivity in India Joyleen Kour	Session 1.C (Workshop) The Courage of Our Convictions: Finding and Using Your Scholarly Voice Claire Hadfield, Plymouth Marjon University
12:55 - 13:45	Lunch		
13:45 - 14:35	Session 2.A "They're Really Well-Established": Researching an Industry Nobody Wanted Me to Question Jaimie O'Connor, University of Bristol The Cow in the Room: Managing conflict in collaborative food systems	Session 2.B Courage in Chaos: Cultivating Resilience, Novelty, and Purpose as an Early Career Researcher Ashraf Ahmed Kuhail, University of Bath Inconvenient sources: Reframing uncertainty from barrier to resource	Session 2.C (Workshop) Sharing Courage in Researching Challenges That Societies Are Facing Today Ellie-Anne Jones and Regan Eminson, Bournemouth University

	governance Kezia Kershaw, UWE Bristol	Bathsheba Slater-Wells, University of Exeter	
14:35 - 14:45	**Break**		
14:45 - 15:35	**Session 3.A** Responsibility in Preparation: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Social Work Education Ellie Coleman, University of Bristol Teaching Controversy in Challenging Times: Children's Literature and the Professional Interpretive Judgement of Teachers Teaching Controversial Issues in Primary RE Selina Day, Plymouth Marjon University	**Session 3.B** When Research is Designed for a World that No Longer Exists: Courage, Uncertainty and the Potentialities of Disruption Liam Hilton, University of Exeter Navigating Uncertainty: Researching Law in a Changing Regulatory Landscape Saba Mokhtari, University of Exeter	**Session 3.C (Workshop)** Working Reflexively with Emotionally Demanding Research Hayley Redman and Ellie Hepworth, University of Exeter
15:35 - 15:45	**Break**		
15:45 - 16:45	**Alumni Panel**		
16:45 - 17:15	**Closing remarks**		
17:15- 18:00	**Drinks and Networking**		

Presentation and Workshop Abstracts

Parallel Session 1: 12:05-12:50

Session 1.A

Where Are the Instructions for Public Involvement?

Jude McClellan (UWE Bristol)

Public involvement and engagement are increasingly recognised as essential components of impactful public health research, with co-design, co-production and other participatory approaches often presented as the gold standard for working alongside communities. In theory, the distinctions between these approaches can seem clear. In practice, however, researchers can find themselves navigating considerable uncertainty about where their project sits, what constitutes meaningful involvement, and whether their methods are sufficiently participatory, feasible, or legitimate. Instructions are hard to find, and guidance seems to come in the form of principles.

For postgraduate researchers in particular, this uncertainty can be uncomfortable. We are trained to seek clarity, rigour and justification, yet participatory research often requires us to work in spaces where outcomes, relationships and processes cannot be fully anticipated. Tensions can emerge between participatory ideals and the practical realities of time, resources, ethics and access. Questions arise: What happens when a project cannot be fully co-produced? How do we engage inclusively with people whose voices are rarely heard? How do we avoid inadvertently excluding, silencing or burdening participants while still moving the research forward? And where are the instructions?

Drawing on my experiences of beginning to work with people living with young onset dementia, this presentation reflects on the uncertainties of involving people with lived experience in research. I argue that meaningful participation is not achieved by having all the answers before we start. Rather, it requires a willingness to sit with uncertainty, relinquish some control, and learn alongside those whose expertise comes from lived experience. By sharing both challenges and reflections from my ongoing PhD journey, I explore how becoming more comfortable with not knowing may be an essential skill for participatory research.

From Penguins to Policy: A Placement at the British Antarctic Survey

Jordane Liebeaux (University of Bristol)

The proposed presentation will focus on the three months placement I undertook earlier this year at the British Antarctic Survey (Cambridge, UK). As my PhD research focuses on Antarctic environmental law and governance, I worked with the Environmental Office at BAS to draft and contribute to various policy papers with the United Kingdom delegation to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which was held in May. The Antarctic Treaty

Consultative Meeting is the annual diplomatic gathering of all the States that ratified the Antarctic Treaty to discuss Antarctic affairs, including environmental ones.
The presentation will therefore reflect on the role of research in Antarctic environmental policymaking, the challenges encountered for policy impact, and main take aways. The papers I worked on touched on emperor penguins and ship traffic, seals and biosecurity, ballast water management, and cumulative impacts around research stations in Antarctica. This aligns with the conference theme of impact as contributing to policymaking is a possible path for researchers to bring about change and influence decision-makers. The presentation will for instance discuss the information papers I worked on and how they practically impacted decisions at the Meeting. This would be an opportunity to share a story from a placement, which is now required by the SWDTP, answer questions about placements, and highlight the value of interdisciplinarity, as a major part of my work involved bridging the gap between natural sciences, law, and policy.

Session 1.B

Keeping the Box Open: Rethinking Certainty in Researching Statelessness

Qi Ye (University of Bath)

Research is often seen as a process of moving from uncertainty towards certainty. We start with questions, collect evidence, and work towards answers. But what if uncertainty is not something research needs to overcome?

This presentation uses Schrödinger's cat as a metaphor for uncertainty in research. Before the box is opened, we do not know what is inside. Opening the box may give us an answer, but it may also raise new questions. I suggest that research works in a similar way. At different stages of a project, our questions, concepts, categories and assumptions can remain uncertain until we encounter them through research. Even then, what we find may only give us partial or provisional answers.

I explore this through my developing doctoral research with Vietnamese young people living in conditions of long-term statelessness in Cambodia. At the beginning of the research, categories such as "stateless" and "education" may seem clear. Once we consider lived experience, they become more complicated. A person's statelessness may not be easy to establish before entering the field. Defining education in advance may also lead me to assume that schooling is its main or defining form.

These uncertainties have shaped how I think about my research design. They have also made me question how much certainty a researcher should seek before entering the field. I am interested in what happens when some categories are left open. This may give participants more space to shape what becomes visible and meaningful in the research.

In this presentation, I reflect on uncertainty as part of the research process. I ask whether keeping the "box" open can help researchers question their assumptions and remain open to unexpected forms of knowledge. For me, uncertainty is not simply a stage before an answer. It can shape how we ask questions, design research and understand what we learn from participants.

Researching Uncertainty: Charismatic Political Discourse, Youth Polarisation and Ethical Reflexivity in India

Joyleen Kour

Researching charismatic political discourse in politically sensitive contexts requires scholars to navigate uncertainty not only as a constraint, but also as a constitutive feature of the research. This presentation reflects on my MRes dissertation which examined Narendra Modi's political discourse and its relationship to youth polarisation and social cohesion in India. This presentation engages with the question on how uncertainty shaped the project's design, participants' engagement, the researcher's methodological decisions and the interpretation of political voices.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. First, selected speeches were analysed using the Discourse-Historical Approach, with attention to rhetorical strategies, ideological framing and the construction of political in-groups and out-groups. Second, an online survey explored political perceptions among young people aged 18–35. However, the research unfolded within a digitally mediated and politically sensitive environment marked by mistrust, concerns about surveillance and fear of political repercussions. These conditions contributed to low response rates, restricted access to minority perspectives and the possibility of self-censorship.

The presentation traces the motivations, dead ends and methodological pivots that shaped the project. It considers how data minimisation, anonymisation, adaptive sampling, manual transcription and translation, and reflexive journaling were used to protect participants while maintaining methodological rigour. It also reflects on researcher positionality and the limits of interpreting data produced under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than treating ethical and methodological challenges as external obstacles, the presentation examines how they became part of the empirical context and influenced what participants felt able or willing to say.

The central argument is that uncertainty can generate methodological creativity and deepen ethical reflexivity. At the same time, it exposes the unequal conditions through which political knowledge is produced, voices become visible and research impact is assessed. By documenting emerging forms of youth political engagement and polarisation, the project contributes to debates on charismatic politics, democratic backsliding and social cohesion. It ultimately argues that early-career research in uncertain times can be both critically engaged and socially responsible when it acknowledges the limits of its evidence, prioritises participant safety and treats uncertainty as an object of analysis rather than merely a problem to overcome.

Keywords: charismatic political discourse; youth polarisation; India; political uncertainty; ethical reflexivity; researcher positionality; democratic backsliding; social cohesion

Session 1.C (Workshop)

The Courage of Our Convictions: Finding and Using Your Scholarly Voice

Claire Hadfield (Plymouth Marjon University)

Theme: Exploring how researchers can articulate and justify their perspectives while navigating uncertainty, self-doubt and questions of legitimacy and belonging.

Aim: Support postgraduate researchers in recognising the value of their scholarly voice, identifying barriers to using it, and developing practical strategies for making courageous, reflexive and evidence-informed contributions to their research communities.

Main Activity: Through guided reflection and paired discussion, participants will explore the experiences, values and perspectives that shape their scholarly voice. Using a structured scaffold, they will formulate, articulate and rehearse a contribution drawn from their own research, responding to constructive questions and refining their position, before leaving with practical actions to take forward.

Parallel Session 2: 13:45-14:35

Session 2.A

“They're Really Well-Established”: Researching an Industry Nobody Wanted Me to Question

Jaimie O'Connor (University of Bristol)

Aim: To reflect on what it takes to pursue research that established authorities actively discourage and to show how that discouragement became part of the argument itself.

Early in this PhD, I was told by people regulating the UK weight-loss industry that there was little point studying it as the major companies of focus are long-established and reputable, and the real story now is weight-loss injections. Both claims are reasonable on their face. But I argue that this is precisely why the industry has escaped scrutiny for so long - it is too normalised to seem worth questioning, and the policy conversation has moved on before the behavioural and commercial programmes millions still use were ever properly examined.

I persisted anyway. Using a social-harm (zemiological) framework informed by feminist body scholarship, my research asks whether the weight-loss industry can comply with regulation and still cause foreseeable and preventable harm to consumers. Evidence is drawn from a qualitative content analysis of public-facing marketing from two of the UK's largest weight-loss companies, alongside interviews with the women who used these programmes, former employees, and regulatory professionals.

The findings suggest harm is produced through design: claims that are deliberately misleading by implication, testimonials that imply typical results from exceptional cases, and digital environments that place risk and responsibility onto the individual. Compliance, in other words, is not the same as harm prevention, and the confidence that "well-established" means "safe" is part of what allows the harm to continue unremarked.

The presentation offers this as a case study in researcher courage in the persistence required to keep investigating something the relevant experts have declared minor or old news. It speaks to any researcher who has been told their question is the wrong one.

I hope attendees will leave with a concrete example of how compliance and harm coexist, and a reminder that "no one thinks this matters" is sometimes the strongest reason to continue.

The Cow in the Room: Managing Conflict in Collaborative Food Systems Governance

Kezia Kershaw (UWE Bristol)

UK food systems are in urgent need of transformation for social and ecological sustainability, as laid bare by the recent extreme heat and drought of summer 2026. A critical component of necessary transformation is the future of animal agriculture, primarily ruminant livestock (cows and sheep), given over 70% of the farm land in the UK is given to raising and feeding animals (including crops for animal feed). However, it is very challenging to talk about this topic. In this presentation I will share my interim research findings from a case study of collaborative multi-stakeholder governance, a process by the Agri-Food for Net Zero Network that led to the publication of a report on how to get the UK food system to net zero by 2050. Using mixed methods (interviews and social network analysis) I am exploring: how has an existing, successful initiative engaged the contentious issues of the future of livestock? What can we learn from the successes and challenges, to inform courageous research and action for a sustainable UK food system?

Session 2.B

Courage in Chaos: Cultivating Resilience, Novelty, and Purpose as an Early Career Researcher

Ashraf Ahmed Kuhail (University of Bath)

Researching in a rapidly changing world takes on a fundamentally different meaning when the chaos is not abstract, but deeply personal. As a Palestinian early career researcher, a survivor of the genocide in Gaza, and a father navigating life in the UK with five children, my academic journey is shaped by acute trauma, heavy family responsibilities, and ongoing anguish for loved ones left behind. This paper explores how navigating severe personal uncertainty and profound loss intersects with the academic imperative to innovate and create meaningful societal impact. Rather than viewing personal trauma and systemic disruption purely as barriers, I examine how lived experiences of survival foster a distinct form of resilience, driving novel methodological perspectives and a relentless commitment to purpose-driven research. By critically reflecting on the dual burden of displacement and academic expectations, this work advocates for an empathetic re-imagining of early career research support—one that recognizes the courage it takes to pursue knowledge, advocate for evidence-informed solutions, and generate real-world change while carrying the weight of ongoing conflict and profound human responsibility.

Inconvenient Sources: Reframing Uncertainty from Barrier to Resource

Bathsheba Slater-Wells (University of Exeter)

This presentation reframes uncertainty and inconvenience as strengths of our research, rather than burdens. It aims to provide attendees with a theoretical framework to use

inconvenience as a resource to enhance both methodology and analysis, with a worked example drawn from my own experience in education research.

Uncertainty is a necessary dilemma for researchers designing projects for situations they cannot control. Particularly for those of working with human participants, it can be difficult to predict: who will choose to participate in our research; where and when people will be; what people will say in response to our questions; whether people will answer the specific questions we pose to them at all. All these forms of uncertainty can be inconvenient for researchers attempting to determine the logistical organisation of their project or produce answers to a particular set of questions.

This presentation reframes inconvenience from a barrier to a resource. I draw on a case study from my own educational research to consider participant traits and actions that could be read as 'inconvenient' by researchers. I then apply Berlant's account of the 'inconvenience of other people' (Berlant, 2022), the desire to be in relation with other people that is always in tension with the friction those relationships bring with them. I use this account to re-read inconvenience in research as ethically and politically productive.

Being open to the inconvenience of others means recognising the limitations of our own independence and the assumed understandings that we base our research on. As such, it opens questions that are hugely generative for our research. How can inconvenience reveal the limits of dominant frameworks of knowledge that structure our fields? How can inconvenience challenge power structures underlying our research? Ultimately, how can inconvenience expand the questions it is possible for our research to answer?

Inconvenience cannot be avoided. The people who are inconvenient to our research are precisely the people we want to involve. But rather than attempting to resolve uncertainty, we can centre this and the inconvenience it brings, allowing it to unsettle the assumptions we make about how knowledge is produced and which questions are worth answering. While discomforting, this process of unsettling ourselves and our assumptions can open new avenues for analysis that can only make our research richer.

Workshop Session 2.C (Workshop)

Sharing Courage in Researching Challenges That Societies Are Facing Today

Ellie-Anne Jones & Regan Eminson (Bournemouth University)

The aim of this workshop is to explore and encourage how researchers can address current difficult societal issues in research despite uncertainty or resistance. The session will begin with two 5-minute presentations showcasing impactful research case studies on food security among marginalised consumers and Queer, Romani and Traveller mental health studies. This will be followed by a 10-minute small-group discussion exploring potential barriers to researching sensitive topics, a 10-minute activity applying these ideas to participants' own research, and a final 10-minute session focused on developing an action plan to increase research impact, identifying ways to overcome these barriers. Potential

skills gained include developing interdisciplinary and critical thinking skills for conducting research on sensitive topics.

Parallel Session 3: 14:45-15:35

Session 3.A

Responsibility in Preparation: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Social Work Education

Ellie Coleman (University of Bristol)

Background
LGBTQ+ adults continue to experience a range of health and social care inequalities, including discrimination and poorer mental health outcomes (Government Equalities Office, 2018; LGBT Foundation, 2023).

Although social workers play a pivotal role within the social care workforce (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021), social work education is noted to pay limited attention to sexual orientation, sex and gender identities (Hicks and Jeyasingham, 2016; Hudson-Sharp, 2018) and research highlights gaps in knowledge and confidence when working with LGBTQ+ service users amongst social work practitioners (Sommerville, 2015; Inch, 2017).

While evidence suggests effective education can challenge heteronormative attitudes and enhance professional confidence (Schaub et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2023), Social Work England provides limited direction regarding how programmes should actually address the needs of LGBTQ+ adults.

Research Question
This project asks: How does social work education in England address the needs of LGBTQ+ adults? It will examine curriculum documents, regulatory standards and frameworks and explore educator approaches to and experience of teaching and the factors that enable or constrain LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Methodology
Adopting a sequential, multiphase design, this study integrates findings across three interconnected phases, with each phase informing subsequent stages. Early consultation with LGBTQ+ adults with experience of social care and/or social work practitioners will help ground the study and shape its focus on meaningful inclusion. Subject to ethical approval, the study will comprise three phases. To explore the explicit curriculum, phase one will involve qualitative content analysis of social work curricula, professional standards, regulatory frameworks and training guidance to explore how the topic is conceptualised. The implicit curriculum will be explored in phase two and three. Phase two will involve vignette-informed interviews with social work educators and phase three will include focus groups with a sperate sample social work educators, with data produced across these phases being analysed using Reflexive thematic analysis. Ethical approval is currently being sought, with data collection anticipated to commence following approval.

Conference Theme
This research aligns with “Creating Impact in Challenging Times” theme as it addresses an established inequality while examining a key point at which change can occur in a complex socio-political climate. The study aspires to create impact by generating an evidence base capable of informing curriculum development and wider professional and regulatory

discussions. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to improved training of social workers and experiences of LGBTQ+ adults.

Teaching Controversy in Challenging Times

Selina Day (Plymouth Marjon University)

Primary Religious Education (RE) provides an important space for children to encounter complex and controversial issues. However, teaching such issues requires teachers to navigate questions of representation, appropriateness and meaning within increasingly complex educational and social contexts. Contemporary children's literature offers opportunities to facilitate these encounters through narrative, yet its use for teaching controversial issues within primary RE remains underexplored.

This doctoral study investigates how primary teachers exercise professional interpretive judgement when using contemporary non-religious children's literature to engage with controversial issues in RE. It explores how teachers interpret texts, anticipate the meanings they may generate and negotiate their pedagogical possibilities within particular classroom contexts. Rather than positioning controversiality as an inherent property of a text or topic, the study considers how meaning and perceptions of controversiality are socially constructed, interpreted and negotiated within particular educational contexts.

Situated within an interpretivist paradigm and informed by a social constructivist lens, the study employs a qualitative three-stage design comprising pre-lesson interviews, participant observation of multiple sequences of lessons across primary age phases and schools in Devon and London, and post-lesson interviews. This design enables professional interpretive judgement to be examined across time: as anticipated before teaching, enacted during the pedagogical encounter, and reflected upon and reconstructed afterwards.

Emerging findings indicate how teachers negotiate the pedagogical possibilities offered by children's literature alongside questions of representation, subject knowledge, controversiality and perceived risk. These insights inform the development of a Conceptual Book Framework designed to support, rather than prescribe, teachers' professional interpretive judgement when considering literature for controversial issues in primary RE.

The presentation aims to share emerging insights into how professional interpretive judgement operates when teachers use children's literature to engage pupils with controversial issues, and to consider the implications for supporting teachers to navigate complex and potentially contested classroom encounters. It will introduce the developing Conceptual Book Framework and invite discussion about how such a framework might support, rather than constrain, professional judgement.

The study argues that professional interpretive judgement is central to enabling meaningful, critical and dialogic engagement with controversial issues through children's literature in primary RE.

Session 3.B

When Research is Designed for a World that No Longer Exists

Liam Hilton (University of Exeter)

This presentation explores what happens when the conditions in which a research project was conceived change so dramatically that, quite literally, the world it was designed for no longer exists. Reflecting on the uncertainties and disruptions that have shaped my PhD research, I will explore how these have led to unexpected connections, collaborations and community, allowing the research to develop in ways it otherwise might not have. These disruptions have enriched the project while creating opportunities for greater positive impact on the queer Palestinian community my work seeks to amplify and support.

My PhD research explores the lived experience of diasporic queer Palestinians living on Turtle Island (North America). It was originally conceived around fieldwork in Palestine, building on my work and contacts there as a Human Rights Observer. The escalation of violence into an environment of genocide from October 2023 onwards rendered my planned research design untenable, requiring a fundamental reorientation, both geographically and conceptually, towards diasporic Palestinian communities. As political circumstances continued to change, decisions about where research could ethically and practically take place required repeated reconsideration, ultimately taking the project across several locations throughout Turtle Island.

These disruptions have extended beyond research logistics. Had I conducted research in Palestine, I may have been afforded a level of trust by the perceived sacrifices involved in being there. Conducting research within diasporic communities during a time of genocide, while the countries in which they live actively support the state engaging in genocide, instead required navigating questions of trust, positionality and suspicion regarding my intentions and affiliations. This required me to reassess how I approach recruitment and relationships with those participating.

Disruption cannot be understood solely as an obstacle to overcome. Moving the research across geographical and intellectual contexts has generated unexpected encounters, questions and possibilities that could not have been anticipated. It has required me to consider more deeply my responsibilities towards the queer Palestinian community, my relationships with collaborators, and what forms of knowledge can emerge through disruption.

This presentation therefore asks what courage in research means when the material conditions underpinning a project no longer exist. It explores how researchers might respond to uncertainty not merely through perseverance, but through a willingness to reconsider project plans and research assumptions. It concludes by considering how these experiences have shaped the future direction of the research and how its outcomes might be communicated beyond the university, creating space for creative dialogue and wider societal engagement.

Navigating Uncertainty: Researching Law in a Changing Regulatory Landscape

Saba Mokhtari (University of Exeter)

For legal and socio-legal research projects that consider different aspects or impacts of regulations and policy frameworks, the regulatory structure usually provides the foundation upon which the analysis is built. However, when that legal framework continues to change throughout the research process, researchers must continually revise their research questions, refine the scope of their study, and adapt their methodological approach.

This challenge has been central to my research on marine conservation law. Since beginning my postgraduate study in 2024, significant developments in the regulatory framework governing habitat protection have altered the legal context within which my research is situated. These changes have required me to revise my PhD research proposal several times to ensure that the project remains relevant while maintaining a coherent focus. At the same time, the limited academic literature in this emerging area has made it difficult to identify a clearly defined research gap.

In this presentation, I will reflect on how embracing uncertainty has strengthened rather than hindered my research. I will discuss the strategies I have used to develop my PhD research questions that remain relevant despite regulatory rapid changes, adopt a flexible methodology capable of responding to new legal developments, and address gaps in the literature by drawing more extensively on empirical findings.

Session 3.C (Workshop)

Working Reflexively with Emotionally Demanding Research

Hayley Redman & Ellie Hepworth (University of Exeter)

It is widely recognised across disciplines that doctoral students are often inadequately prepared for the demands of conducting emotionally challenging research. As postgraduate researchers, we have encountered this gap firsthand. In this workshop, we aim to raise awareness of emotionally demanding research, discuss how we can prepare and mitigate these challenges, as well as introduce a variety of ways for working reflexively beyond the traditional reflexivity journal. This session will be suitable for PGRs at any stage of their PhD journey, offering the opportunity for peer support and peer learning.